

CLEARING PATHWAYS TO COLORADO HEALTH CARE LICENSURE



State Initiatives Streamline Entry to Health Care Workforce

The Division of Professions and Occupations (DPO) at the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) has been nationally recognized as a leader in reducing regulatory barriers for licensed professionals.

When it comes to health care licensing, DPO is constantly exploring opportunities to keep barriers to a minimum, and recent initiatives have reduced licensing times, met needs created by health care emergencies, and boosted aid for workers who have historically faced even greater difficulties with licensure.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the

health care workforce has faced historic challenges, which has resulted in the need to provide a surge in licensed individuals.

At DPO, this need drove a number of emergency licensing actions, and also brought to light the importance of a number of existing programs and actions aimed at keeping Colorado's health care workforce strong.

Read below for a summary of both long term measures that have been in place and short term measures in response to the pandemic to increase portability and clear the pathway to licensure in Colorado.

Established Health Care Licensing Measures



NURSE LICENSURE COMPACT

Through DPO, the state of Colorado is a member of the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC), which allows a registered nurse (RN) or licensed practical/vocational nurse (PN) to possess a multistate license to practice across state lines in all participating states. The NLC increases access to care while maintaining public protection at the state level. Under the existing compact, nurses can provide care to patients in 38 states without having to obtain additional state-specific licenses.



MORE ABOUT COMPACTS

Colorado holds similar compact agreements in a variety of professions, including medical, physical therapy and psychology. Compacts streamline relicensing, support spouses of relocating military personnel, create better pathways for interstate practice, facilitate the use of telehealth technologies, enhance member states' ability to protect the public, and increase the public's access to care and other important services. Compacts promote collaboration between the states and reduce regulatory barriers to both workforce entry and state-to-state mobility.



LICENSING FOR FOREIGN-TRAINED APPLICANTS

Colorado recognizes the potential held by foreign-trained health care workers, and has worked in recent years to streamline licensure for qualified professionals. The Colorado Nurse-Physician Advisory Task Force for Colorado Healthcare (NPATCH) recently issued numerous recommendations to the state legislature aimed at assisting international medical graduates in obtaining a Colorado physicians license. Additionally, DPO is currently analyzing the nursing program for new licensing measures that can expedite the process for foreign-trained individuals.



LICENSING FOR MILITARY AND MILITARY SPOUSES

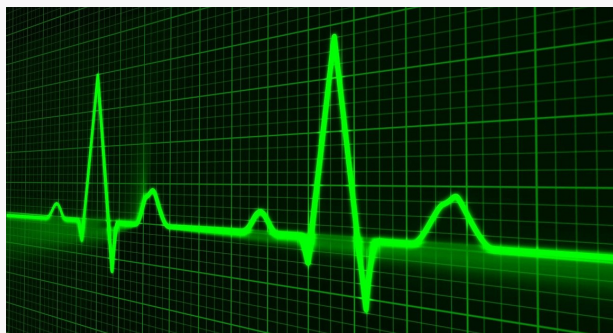
In 2020, legislation was passed to allow the spouse of an active duty military member to receive a free, three year license to practice their profession in Colorado, provided a similar license is held in good standing in another state. Further, the Veterans Occupational Credentialing and Licensing (VOCAL) program implemented an initiative allowing veterans to use military experience to satisfy applicable educational and experience requirements for licensure.

Pandemic Response



TEMPORARY AND EMERGENCY LICENSES

As the pandemic grew in Colorado, DPO responded to the need for additional workers by creating the means for temporary and emergency licensure for health care professionals. These licenses aimed to expand the workforce, and assisted recent graduates struggling to complete clinical examinations needed to enter the field during a time when many schools and testing centers had suspended operations. Through the measures, professionals with licenses in good standing from other states, those with expired credentials, and recent graduates were able to step into the workforce with temporary or emergency licenses.



EXPANDED SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The presence of COVID-19 in Colorado also prompted emergency regulations for multiple health care professions that expanded the scope of work they were allowed to perform (known as scope of practice). These provisions allowed certain qualified individuals within a hospital or inpatient health facility to perform services, primarily the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine, while working under the proper delegation and supervision of a medical professional. Respiratory therapists, chiropractors, optometrists, and other professionals stepped up during the crisis to utilize these provisions and give a needed boost to the health care field.



IMPACT OF TEMPORARY AND EMERGENCY LICENSES

Since the start of the pandemic, over 7,000 temporary licenses have helped boost the state's health care workforce, with 82% of these licenses going to Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs). Another 800 nurses were issued temporary licenses while waiting for testing sites to reopen. Temporary licenses are issued to CNAs, international medical graduates and nurses from non-compact states, and DPO continues to shift and devote additional resources to expediting these licenses for those working on the front lines of the crisis.



CNA EDUCATIONAL CHANGES

During the pandemic, clinical testing sites for Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs) suspended operations, causing a backlog in qualified individuals ready to enter the workforce. In response, DPO made provisions which allowed education to continue through simulation so that more CNAs could enter the field to care for vulnerable Coloradans. Due to additional resources devoted to this program, there is currently no wait for those wanting to sit for the written exam. Additionally, the process is being even more streamlined to allow greater flexibility in written examinations.